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## REVIEW OF A DISCOURSE

### PREACHED BY THE REV. T. S. ELLERBY, IN ZION CHURCH, TORONTO, OCT. 30, 1864,

BEING A LETTER ADDRESSED TO THAT GENTLEMAN

BY THE REV. W. F. CLARKE.

TORONTO, November 2, 1864.

THE REV. T. S. ELLERBY,—

DEAR SIR,—A painful but imperative sense of duty impels me to address you, in reference to the discourse delivered by you last Lord's Day morning, from Col. 3: 3, 4: "*For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.*"

Your discourse, in my view, embodied germs, more or less developed, of the most pernicious error. Sermons previously preached by you, in my hearing, have been marked by unsatisfactory and objectionable features, more especially from the manner in which they toned down, explained away, or concealed from view, the vital truths of the gospel. But the discourse to which I now refer, was of a more alarming character, inasmuch as it contained principles and was based on theories, whose tendency can only be to undermine the very foundations of our faith. The text you chose is one of the most interesting and pregnant passages in the New Testament. A faithful explication of it would necessarily bring out very prominently the fundamental truths of the gospel. Yet I am constrained to say there was not a single clear exhibition of the way of salvation in the entire sermon. A Moralist, Broad Churchman, Rationalist, or Unitarian, if not, even a sceptic, like M. Renan, might have either preached or heard it with perfect consistency. These are grave allegations, and I now proceed to sustain them by proof.

Under your first head of discourse: "The aspects of the christian's death;" you dwelt chiefly on its connexion with and similarity to Christ's death. You quoted and amplified upon the passage, "I am crucified with Christ." This you explained to mean that the christian carries about with him constantly the scene of the crucifixion, and tries to have it realized in regard to himself. It is, you stated, always before his mind's eye, teaching him the evil of sin, reminding him that his pride and vain-glory are to be crowned with thorns, his fleshly desires fed with vinegar, &c. In this way, seeking to be like Christ in his death, the christian becomes dead to the world and dead to sin. I do not profess to give your exact words, but the above is the substance of them. To all who are familiar with theological controversy, it will suffice to say, that you gave us a thoroughly Unitarian explanation of the influence of Christ's death. You ascribed to it simply the power of example. That was all. The picture you represented the christian as carrying about with him everywhere, was a picture of a *model sufferer*—not that of an atoning Saviour. It showed the beholder the evil of sin, not as a display of God's righteousness in the upholding of His holy law, in putting His well-beloved Son to grief, and making his soul a sacrifice for sin; but as an emblematic representation of the crucifixion of sin in the christian. The power of Christ's death to renew and transform the soul, to slay its enmity, and subdue it by Divine love, were wholly left out of view by you. Not a hint was

given as to the relations of Christ's death to the law of God, as to its vicarious character, or as to its atoning merit. Not only the text, but your own division of it, demanded that you should speak explicitly of these things, and that you should describe the process by which "the old man which is corrupt" is slain by Divine grace. Yet you avoided all these vital matters, said only a few feeble things about the influence of the crucifixion scene as an example, and contented yourself with purely Unitarian "aspects of the christian's death." No man ever yet died to sin in the way you described, and if that be all the means of deliverance from the "body of sin and death" which the gospel provides, then we have no salvation, our faith is vain, and we are yet in our sins. It is quite evident that in what Paul says to the Colossians respecting the christian's death, he refers to that gracious transition from a state of condemnation to one of justification and acceptance, on which he dilates so fully in the 6th and 7th chapters of his Epistle to the Romans. He there describes the believer as having become dead to the law and to sin, "*by the body of Christ,*" that is by the efficacy of his atoning death. Through faith he comes out of a state of nature into a state of grace. He stands before God on a new footing. His guilt is pardoned and "the body of sin is destroyed, that henceforth he should not serve sin." The christians at Colosse are spoken of as having experienced all this. Paul refers to the ever-memorable epoch of their justification through Christ. He speaks of it as a thing already accomplished. Literally his language is, "*for ye die,*" and your life is hid with Christ in God." Surely there is far more here than the mere pictorial effect of the crucifixion-scene, or the influence of Christ's dying example.

Under the second head of discourse, in speaking of "The mystery of the christian's life," you enunciated another Unitarian theory. You gave us no intelligible or scriptural account of the beginnings of the new life. You did not honour the Holy Spirit's agency as "the Lord and Giver of life" to dead souls, and you left your hearers wholly in the dark as to there being such an experience as "*the new birth unto righteousness.*" No Divine quickening from the death in trespasses and sins,—no verification of our Lord's assurance, "the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and they that hear shall live;"—nothing like a new creation or resurrection, by God's gracious power, marked the dawn of spiritual life, in your account of it. You insisted that "*there is no such thing as immediateness*" about spiritual life, and that it comes on little by little, in a gradual way. Somehow the life principle is there, and only needs the use of means to nurse it into vigour. You were eloquent about the christian's own performances, but mute about Christ's work in and for him. "Every sigh heaved, every tear dropped, every prayer offered, every effort put forth by the christian *helped him a little;*" but there was no glimpse of an Almighty, indwelling Saviour helping him at all. Moreover, you described spiritual life as a *hidden thing*, and stated that our most precious and deep experiences in religion are *most secret*.

All through their earthly life, christians were represented as necessarily unacquainted with one another. You likened them to books, of which we see only the binding and lettering, without knowing anything of the contents.

All this is completely at variance with the Word of God. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." Look at your assertion that "there is no such thing as immediateness about soul-life," side by side with Scripture facts. When 3,000 were converted on the day of Pentecost, was there "no immediateness" about what they experienced? When Paul was smitten to the earth, was there "no immediateness" about that life whose birth-cry rung out in the enquiry, "Lord what wilt Thou have me to do?" When the Philippian jailor sprang in and came trembling, and asked, "What must I do to be saved?" was there "no such thing as immediateness" about that soul-life which flashed in upon him from God? The truth is that spiritual life in its origin is always immediate, instantaneous. There must be a *moment* when the great transition is experienced, and the soul "*passes* from death unto life." As to the workings of Divine grace in the heart of a christian being a profound secret, hidden from all about him, it is contradicted by David's exclamation, "Come and hear all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul:" by John's declaration "that which we have seen and heard and our hands have handled of the Word of Life declare unto you, *that ye also may have fellowship with us*:"—and by the testimony of myriads of christians, all of whom have felt that their deepest experiences crave sympathy, and that in all that stirs the soul most profoundly, it is not good for us to be alone. The fact is that your text described the christian's life as being hidden not in the secret recesses of his own soul, but in the deep clefts of the Rock of Ages. It is hidden not in the sense that no one but God can be cognizant of its existence and workings, but in the sense that no enemy can get at it to harm or destroy it. It is hidden not as you told us, in the inaccessible and unseen depths of the christian's own being, "like a pearl in the sea, like treasures in the grave, or like a diamond in the dark," but it is hidden like a store of gold in some secure place, out of reach of the robber who would filch it away. The believer lives because Christ his unseen Saviour lives. His "life is hid with Christ in God,"—that wondrous Being who is the "King Invisible, whom no man hath seen, neither can see." The Christian possesses a life whose secret springs are hidden and Divine. Its breath was breathed into him, and its pulsations are sustained by that Infinite Spirit whose operations are at once viewless and mighty as the wind, which "bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth: So is EVERY ONE THAT IS BORN OF THE SPIRIT." What a low, unworthy view is the one presented in your sermon, when contrasted with that which the Apostle holds up before us!

I ask myself how can it be that a minister of your education and standing should preach in such a style? It is impossible to admit the charitable supposition that it is through oversight. That amounts to a charge of ignorance, of which I cannot think you guilty. You surely know whence these theories come, and whither they tend. Your theological training and reading must have informed you on these points. Besides, with the full knowledge that some of your people felt your preaching defective in clear gospel statement, and even suspected you of sympathetic leanings toward Unitarianism, one would think you would guard with jealous care any avenues through which such feelings and suspicions might gain anything to feed upon.

Unfortunately for a charitable judgment upon your sermon, there is conclusive evidence of another kind forbidding all idea of inadvertence. The discourse was not your own. "Alas! master, for it

was borrowed," very much of it at least, from a work by the Rev. W. G. Barrett, a source from which on other occasions you have helped yourself considerably. I do not refer to this to condemn your availing yourself of such help. I care little for originality as compared with orthodoxy. But in your use of the work in question, you have shown a *studied avoidance of certain themes*, which speaks volumes. On a prior occasion, when you preached what I felt to be a most unsatisfactory sermon on the text, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" a similar instance occurred. It was not so marked as in the present case, but you then took freely from Mr. Barrett, *except when he spoke out in plain terms of man's guilt and Christ's atoning sacrifice and power to save*. In the sermon I am now reviewing, you seem to have avoided, with a sort of instinctive aversion, clear, gospel statements concerning the helpless guilt of the sinner, and the atoning sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. The discourse from which you borrowed largely last Sabbath, contains most unambiguous statements of gospel truth. You took what precedes and what follows those statements, and cast the statements themselves away. Now, why was this? But one reply can be given to this question, viz., *that you do not relish such truths*.

Every attentive hearer of your sermon last Lord's Day morning will recollect the following passage, which you copied almost verbatim from Barrett:—

"We have frequently remarked this striking peculiarity in the New Testament, that Christ and the christian life are invariably associated with each other. Everywhere throughout the New Testament, in the sayings of Christ himself, and in the writings of the apostles, our life—the inner, divine life—is suspended on our union with Christ; so much so, that in passages so numerous that it would be wearisome to quote them, it is again and again said, that where Christ is there is life, and where Christ is not there is not life. 'I am the life,' said Jesus of Nazareth; 'Christ is our life,' said Paul the converted Jew.

"This language is used only in reference to Christ. No other, of all the inspired religious teachers of the Bible is ever once so spoken of. Christ alone has this pre-eminence. A great gulf, and impassable, is fixed between Christ and all other christian teachers, prophets, and others, simply by the terms which are studiously applied to him,—jealously refused to them. We are indebted to Paul, and John, and Peter for *ideas*; for *thoughts*; for *suggestions*; for many long and elaborate arguments; for many expositions of christian truth and worship; but it is never said that Paul is our life; that if we keep the sayings of John we shall never see death; that when Peter, who is our life, shall appear, we also shall appear with him; or that our life is hid with Luke in God. So far as phraseology is concerned, this is a marked peculiarity of the New Testament, and, to a thoughtful mind would seem to indicate a mighty difference between Christ and all other christian teachers. But this peculiarity is more striking still, when we remember that Christ died a violent death at the early age of thirty-three, after only three years of public ministry; so that, looked at from a purely human point of view, Paul, and John, and Peter, lived longer, laboured more, and suffered more in body than Christ himself; added to which Christ's teachings were limited to one small locality, Judea; not touching Syria; not penetrating to Asia Minor; much less going over to Greece, and thence on to Italy; so that, as a matter of fact, the success of christianity, regarded only as a scheme of doctrine, depended vastly more on his successors than on himself; and yet he is everywhere represented as the central idea, and central personage, of christian truth."—*Barrett's Sketches*, vol. 1, pp. 382, 383.

After the above extract, Mr. Barrett gives a faithful, vivid portrait of our ruined, helpless, imperilled state as sinners, which apparently had no charms for you. There is also an exhibition of Christ as the *procuring* cause of soul-life, which you in like manner passed over. A mind hungering and thirsting for the gospel, would have seized with eager avidity the very statements which you seem to have rejected. They are these:—

"First, as sinners, that is as those who have broken the law of God, and are therefore under condemnation of death, we can only be delivered by Christ; and, therefore, in that sense, Christ is our life.

"[The proud consciousness of having a body better and nobler than the bodies of the beasts, and a soul that shall live when the souls of the beasts shall have perished, is crushed by the humiliating consciousness that I can sin, as they cannot, and reject, when they cannot, the life eternal.]

"All around I see sin, and sinners sinning; all around I see men trying to get over the mighty difficulty sin has occasioned; and though they try to excuse it by falling back on physical and mental peculiarities; conscience says it won't do; and hence we have tortures, and offerings, and penances, and sacrifices, and humiliations, as the confession of sin and its exceeding sinfulness; and so 'all have sinned and come short of the glory of God,' with this consciousness, 'I die daily.' I look up, there is the judgment-seat, with its everlasting righteousness; I look around, and all my companions are in the same condemnation, 'none of them can by any means redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him;' I look within, and the case is hopeless. If I wash myself in snow-water, and make myself never so clean, yet wilt thou plunge me into the ditch, and my own clothes shall abhor me; I look behind, and there are dark clouds gathering, and I shall soon be overtaken with the tempest; I look forward, and there is death and the grave; and after death the judgment—what does that mean? 'Our God is a consuming fire.'

"In the midst of all this guilt and misery Christ comes; comes as a man that he may save men;—our misery has reached his loving heart, and because that misery came from our guiltiness, he has come to take that guilt away. He knows that we are dead—dead in trespasses and sins—and he comes that we might have life, and have it more abundantly. And having by his preaching *published* life, by his own sacrifice on the cross he *procured* it; he became a curse for us; 'he who knew no sin, became sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.' But, having died once for all, he rose again; resumed his human nature; entered into the holiest of all; and there appears in the presence of God for us. 'Delivered for our offences, he was raised for our justification;' and now, because he lives, we shall live also; we have found through Christ the path of life; we rise from despair, and say, 'I thank God there is deliverance through Christ Jesus our Lord;'—the lost life is found; found never to be lost again; it is hid with Christ in God."—*Ib.*, pp. 383, 384.

"As nearly as my memory serves me, you gave us, in a somewhat garbled form, part or all of that small portion of the above quotation which I have bracketed; but you said nothing, either in Mr. Barrett's words or your own, concerning the sinner's hopeless condition out of Christ, or the Saviour having, "by his own sacrifice on the cross, *procured* life for us." You carefully removed the marrow and gave us the empty bone;—you took off and threw away the cream, and presented us with the skimmed milk.

Coming again to what was apparently more palatable to you, you availed yourself of a paragraph on Christ's example, which, as associated with Christ's sacrifice, is good New Testament teaching, but dissociated from that sacrifice,—nay, made to supersede it—is "another gospel which is not another;" for it is no gospel at all. Vainly do we preach imitation of Christ's example, unless we base it upon trust in his atoning sacrifice. Your hearers will recognize the extract I now refer to. It reads as follows:—

"Religion is the influence of Christ on the soul. It is a life; an inner principle that controls and commands all external manifestations. The man may be, and is, very imperfect and faulty; he knows it well, and sad at heart he often is thereupon; still, that which is most real and most self-manifest to him is, that Christ lives in him. He may not be able to tell you all about the philosophy of the thing, but he knows the fact and it is the joy of his joys, the life of his life, the central spring whose living waters do ever refresh his heart of hearts. Christ liveth in me; Christ's obedience liveth in me, and I am striving to be joyfully obedient for Christ's sake; Christ's submission to his Father's will liveth in me, and I am striving, with many prayers, to say, 'Father thy will be done;' Christ's love liveth in me, and, constrained by its quickening impulses, I have overthrown the old monopoly of evil passions to which I once rendered obedience, and have entered a kingdom where all is 'peace, and righteousness, and joy in the Holy Ghost.'"—*Ib.*, p. 385.

These quotations reveal a principle of selection only to be explained by the law of affinities. Like attracts like. Deliberately,

it would seem, you refused, even when using the sermon of another, to discourse on either of, what one has quaintly styled, "the three R's, Ruin, Regeneration, Redemption."

In the passages appropriated by you from Mr. Barrett, there occur here and there unguarded and objectionable forms of expression, such as the following, in regard to Christ: "No other of all the inspired religious teachers of the Bible;" "Christ and all other Christian teachers;" "The success of Christianity, regarded only as a scheme of doctrine, depended vastly more on his successors than on himself;" "Religion is the influence of Christ on the soul." The most serious and alarming errors lurk in these quotations, taken by themselves. To bring Christ down to the level of "the inspired religious teachers of the Bible," or the still lower level of "Christian teachers" generally, is in effect to ignore his divinity and do him infinite dishonour. To speak of Christianity as in any sense "vastly more" dependent "on his successors than on himself," is a very grave misrepresentation. Christ has no successors. In every age his declaration holds good: "I AM the truth." He sent forth his apostles with the assurance, "Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." All the success Christianity has had, or ever will have, is to be accounted for on the principle of Christ's presence and power. Nor is it correct to say that "Religion is the influence of Christ on the soul," in the sense in which that language must be taken in the isolated paragraph it commences; for only Christ's example is spoken of in that paragraph, and religion is far more than that. These unguarded and unscriptural statements are deprived, to a great extent, of their mischievous tendency in Mr. Barrett's discourse, because they are neutralized by passages declarative of Christ's deity and atonement. But as used by you, in a separate, isolated form, there was nothing to counterbalance them, or counteract their baleful influence. You gave us the bane without the antidote. You took a rather unwholesome article of food, and by withdrawing the only nutritious element in it, converted it into poison. Whatever may be Mr. Barrett's doctrinal professions, (and I do not know what they are,) he is a most unsafe, incautious writer. He has evidently an ill-balanced mind, and an unsound judgment, though he is not without warm, Christian impulses. But to take him for a guide is anything but safe.

Before I conclude, I cannot forbear alluding to another serious, though less momentous, error in your discourse. You told us that the good die early: that earth attracts the earthly, and heaven attracts the heavenly: that those whose "hearts are dry as dust stay in this world a long time," and then strangely mingling figures in a passage unmistakably your own, you added, "the flame burning in the socket a great while." Now, I really thought all intelligent Christians had thrown away that idea long since. It is a grievous libel on the government of God, and a great discouragement to youthful piety. Have you never heard of the little boy who told his mother he did not want to be good, and when asked why not, replied because good little boys die and go to heaven, and I want to stay with you? You stated that there is a law which operates in this way, and that it explains the reason why so many of the human race die in infancy. Do you seriously believe that the infants who die are any more heavenly in their nature than the infants who live? Besides, what a slur upon the grace of God, and what an injury to the feelings of aged saints this idea involves. There sat before you while you preached thus, hoary-headed Christians, and you in effect told them that they were lingering on earth because their hearts were "dry as dust," and that if they had only been sufficiently heavenly, they would have died long ago. Moreover, what a contradiction of the Word of God, in which Jehovah promises the righteous man—"with long life will I satisfy him;" declares concerning heavenly wisdom, that "length of days is in her right hand;"—teaches us that "the hoary head is a crown



of glory," not a badge of shame, "if it be found in the way of righteousness;"—and assures us that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

I write thus in no unkind spirit. The Searcher of hearts knoweth that I cherish toward you no feelings except those of a brother. But my soul is grieved, and my spirit stirred within me by these things. I remember the solemn charge to Timothy, "Take heed to thyself and to the doctrine." Truth only can save men. To withhold the gospel is to keep the bread of life from starving, dying souls. To preach the views I have been criticising, is to give a stone when the children ask for bread. Fidelity to my and your Master forbids me to be silent when this is done.

I foresee, too, that the question as to the character and tendency of your preaching must force itself upon the attention of the Church of which you are pastor. Nay, already it is doing so. It is much discussed in private now. Many feel it to be unsatisfactory who do

not rightly know what ails it. "The hungry sheep look up and are not fed." In default of pasturage in their own fields, they wander hither and thither in search of something to eat, and are glad to get the gospel at the hands even of strangers and foreigners. "For Zion's sake and for Jerusalem's sake I will not hold my peace." I cannot keep silence with the convictions your preaching has forced upon me. Earnest contention and protest become solemn duty when "the faith once delivered to the saints" is either openly assaulted or endangered by a sapping and mining process. I therefore publicly nail up these criticisms, as Luther did his theses in defence of the doctrine of justification by faith and salvation by grace. It is the doctrine of a standing or falling minister, even as it is "the doctrine of a standing or falling Church."

I am, Dear Sir,

With much sadness of heart,

Yours very truly,

W. F. CLARKE.